

MODULE 3

INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN

A central principle of Head Start has always been to recognize each child as an individual with unique combinations of strengths and limitations, gifts and needs.

—*The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes* (2003)

CONTEXT

Every day, Head Start staff members find ways to engage and expand on children's interests and strengths. They create learning experiences that appeal to all of the senses and alternate activities for children individually and in small and large groups.

This module presents strategies and challenges for reaching and teaching every child and ways to target daily routines for individualizing assessment and learning.

Module 2 of this unit focused on how protégés work with Mentor-Coaches to assess children's skills, interests, and progress. In this module, you will explore the next step of assessment, implementing strategies for individualizing instruction for children.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completing this module, you will:

- Understand that achievement of learning outcomes is linked to individualized instruction
- Work with protégés to individualize instruction for every child in play, center activities, and routines
- Help protégés identify and use meaningful and functional classroom routines and activities to support learning.



As they select materials and activities, provide support and extended conversations appropriate to each child, and periodically assess the child's progress, teaching staff are "individualizing" the curriculum. That is, they are making adaptations based on children's individual needs.

—*The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes* (2003)

INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE

According to the Head Start Performance Standards, curriculum and instruction should be developmentally and linguistically appropriate, recognizing that children have individual rates of development. We maximize children's growth if we meet each child where he or she is.

Individualizing instruction requires the staff to observe each child's interests, temperament, language, cultural background, and learning style. Individualized instruction is the foundation of a quality early childhood program and ensures the participation of all children.

Successful teaching is not just a matter of teaching style, curriculum, and activities. You must match appropriate instruction to the child, the situation, and the curriculum.

Individualizing instruction requires you to adjust your curriculum plans and presentation of information to each learner, rather than expecting children to mold themselves to the curriculum.

A responsive, inclusive environment supports the needs of all children, and provides ways for each child to participate in program activities.

—Head Start Program Performance Standards (2003)

Activity: What Do You Know?

You probably already know a lot about individualizing instruction. This activity will help you assess your knowledge.

Your facilitator will lead you in a discussion beginning with the K column, “What do you already know about individualizing instruction?” Together, you will complete the columns on the chart on the next page:

- What you already **know** about individualizing instruction (**K**)
- **What** questions you have. **What** you would like to know more about (**W**)
- What you have **learned**. Where you might **look** for more information (**L**)
(You will complete the last column at the end of the module.)

TOPIC: INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION		
What I know (K)	What I want to know (W)	What I learned (L)

STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALIZING

Observing and gathering assessment information for each child is the starting point for individualizing. Thoughtful adaptation of activities and the learning environment allows children to participate with their peers to the fullest extent possible.

Planning For Kambeeka

Dawn, Nora's Mentor-Coach, has been observing a small group BINGO activity. Nora is focusing on phonological awareness skills. Since the three children being observed have good skills, Nora has decided to use letters along with their sounds for matching to BINGO picture boards.

Nora is showing consonant letters and giving their sounds. The children match a letter to the initial sounds of the pictures on their boards. Kambeeka, age four, not only matches the letter to the picture, but also gives several other words that begin with the same consonant sound, including the names of the children in the room and some made-up words.

During the reflective conference Nora asks Dawn for some ideas for challenging Kambeeka. Together they decide on three adaptations. When Nora uses verbal phonological awareness activities in small groups, she usually asks children for rhyming words or words with the same initial sounds. She will individualize the activities for Kambeeka by giving her a fragmented word for blending ("Tell me what /c/ /at/ says") or a whole word for segmenting ("What sounds do you hear in hop?").

Nora will use this plan three times each week. During Dawn's weekly observations, she will note each of Kambeeka's responses exactly as she says them. After three weeks they will look at the observation information and plan next steps.

Activity: How Have You Successfully Individualized Instruction?

In your experience in the classroom, or as a Mentor-Coach, you may have been in a situation where you individualized teacher-child interactions and instruction for a child or for a whole class. Or you may recall situations where you wish you had developed instruction that was more individualized. Take a few minutes to write about your experiences below.

1. The Setting:

2. The Activities:

3. The Adaptations and Other Forms of Individualizing:

4. The Challenges:

5. The Successes:

The critical point is that the focus of the activity—the essence of the experience—is defined not by the whim of the staff, but through careful observation of each individual child and knowledge of the developmental progression: what is the next step for this child on the path to achieving positive outcomes?

—*The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes* (2003)

To guide protégés in individualizing, begin by acknowledging their good teaching practices, while challenging them to build their knowledge of strategies for reaching and teaching every child.

Skills Review

Having a solid understanding of diverse adult learning will make this guidance more productive. Refer to Unit 1, Module 2, for a review.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Ask questions about children and activities based on observation and assessment results
- Observe children and provide feedback to protégés
- Brainstorm with protégés about classroom activities to address each individual child
- Provide resources and strategies.

What Protégés Can Do:

- Know each child's areas of competence and challenge
- Carry out intentionally planned individualized activities
- Observe children and organize information
- Access and use resources.

Discussion Questions

Think about the ways you have observed staff members developing individualized instruction:

1. What strategies did the staff use?

2. What were the strategies used to help children achieve language and literacy outcomes?

3. How did the staff address individual children's interests and ability levels?

Skills Review

In Unit 2, Module 2, you learned about the benefits and limitations of different observation methods and explored ways to conduct objective and accurate observations. Work with your protégé to use some of these techniques to determine which ones help you individualize for each child.

Responsive staff members search for the meaning behind infants' and toddlers' gestures, gurgles, cries and glances. They wonder why particular behaviors occur, come up with educated guesses to explain why, and interact with children to determine whether their guesses are correct.

—R. Parlakian (2004)

Practices for Individualizing Instruction

One of the best ways to ensure individualized instruction for each child is to provide appropriate activities, materials, and interactions every day. This happens in learning centers that use interesting materials that change and rotate regularly. Use of learning centers supports a child's growing ability to make choices and provides opportunities to observe the children in authentic settings.

Practices to support individualized instruction in classrooms and homes include these aspects, all of which provide a basis for children's success and comfort:

- Materials appropriate to a range of child development levels are available for children to choose and access independently.
- Space and materials that allow for good traffic flow and are well organized.
- Consistent rules for the number of children in each center and for material use.
- Staff members actively and intentionally interact with children in the centers, taking the lead from the children, modeling behavior, and expanding children's imaginative play
- Staff members know each child well enough to build on the child's skills by suggesting materials and activities that challenge the child at his or her level.

Use dialogue journals to extend discussions with your protégé. Encourage them to write about their successes and challenges. Ask questions to help them reflect on experiences and come up with different ideas to try.

USING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EACH CHILD

Intentional teaching means thoughtfully providing children with the support and experiences they need to achieve developmentally appropriate skills in early literacy (and other curricular domains). For example, an intentional provider may offer 14-month-olds the opportunity to pick cereal by themselves (which builds fine-motor skills critical to writing) and then later offer children crayons to experiment with (which gives them direct experience with writing and drawing).

R. Parlakian (2004)

Individualizing For D'Jon

Nick has developed a successful relationship with his Mentor-Coach, Miguel. As their professional relationship has progressed so has their understanding of individualizing instruction for the children in Nick's class. One child, D'Jon, is still a mystery for Nick.

During one of Miguel's recent observations, the class of three-year-olds was listening to a tape made by the staff. There were a variety of sounds on the tape: stamping, clapping, various classroom musical instruments, whispering, shouting, etc. As the children heard each sound, they made an appropriate action. D'Jon made many of the actions but only after looking around to see what others were doing.

As Nick thought about the observation, he decided that he wanted to make several classroom changes and spend more time working with D'Jon. He knew that D'Jon's hearing tests were normal. He wanted to see whether specifically drawing D'Jon's attention to sounds would help him.

Miguel agreed with Nick. They came up with:

- Providing pictures or objects for the sounds on the tape (materials modification)
- Limiting the sounds from the tape to five at any one time to maintain his attention (environmental support)
- Providing repetition of the five sounds for three days in a row before introducing new sounds (environmental support)
- Calling D'Jon's attention to and get his eye contact for regularly occurring sounds in the classroom: clean-up bell, the song for lining-up, the school's door bell (which they can hear in their room), the sound of the custodian when he sweeps outside their classroom.

Both Nick and Miguel will take notes on D'Jon's reactions to these sounds and any times when he responds or hears the sounds on his own. They will compare notes weekly. After two or three weeks they will reevaluate their plan and decide upon next steps.

Activity: Knowing Modification Types

The Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes identifies seven research-based types of modifications and adaptations for suiting instructional approaches to each individual child. These strategies center on ways to alter the environment, adapt materials, modify activities, build on children's preferences, use peer support, and provide adult support. They are summarized in **STEP-Doc 4.3a: Individualized Instruction Strategies to Support Each Child**. The seven modification types are:

- Environmental Support
- Materials Modification
- Modified Activity
- Use of Child Preferences
- Peer Support
- Invisible Support
- Adult Support.

Your facilitator will get you started on this activity. Use the space below to record your responses.

Modification Type:

Additional ideas for this modification type:

An example:

Discussion Questions

1. As you think about your role as a Mentor-Coach, how might you build these modification types and strategies into your work with protégés?

2. How would you introduce these modifications and strategies to your protégé?

3. What would you do to help protégés reflect on the effectiveness of their attempts to use new modifications and strategies for children?

4. What resources could you provide to assist your protégé in better meeting the individual needs of children?

VIGNETTE ANALYSIS

Vignette 1: Lisandro

Lisandro is a Spanish-speaking three-year old. He attends a Head Start class two days a week and receives home visits every other week. Both he and his parents are bilingual in Spanish and English. Lisandro's parents want to know what Lisandro is learning in class and how to reinforce it at home.

Carmen, the home visitor, spoke with the classroom staff and with her Mentor-Coach. Everyone agreed that she could try to introduce the parents to the class's nursery rhymes and to emphasize rhymes in both languages. Carmen brings copies of the books Lisandro is using in school to the home visits. When Carmen reads familiar, illustrated nursery rhymes to Lisandro, she pauses for him to fill in the rhyming words. Although he seems to notice the pictures in the book, he responds to her pauses with the correct rhyme only occasionally.

Vignette 2: Geraldo and Linda

Geraldo and Linda are playing in the housekeeping area, which is transformed into a restaurant. Since the staff is emphasizing all aspects of literacy, the center has menus, laminated placemats with children's writing, cookbooks in different languages, pads for taking orders, as well as writing implements and paper of many kinds. Geraldo starts to rhyme when he "writes" (random letters) orders on his pad. (He says, "cereal, bereal," "fruit, toot," "honey, money," "eggs, legs"). Linda twirls her hair and watches Geraldo, but does not make rhymes or say anything at all. She does continue "writing" (a mixture of scribble and letters) on her own order pad.

Vignette 3: Nodin and Sakari

Tayen Whitefeather, a family child care provider and protégé, has just told a traditional Lakota story to the children in her program, which is supported through a Tribal Head Start program. A home visitor and a Mentor-Coach visit her program twice a week to support her literacy efforts with the children.

Tayen has used puppets of a small bear named Mato and his larger mother bear, along with plastic red fish, to add visual elements to the traditional story of how Mato taught people to fish. She has placed the puppets, fish, and other toy animals used to illustrate other stories in the dramatic play corner, where Nodin, 18 months, and Sakari, 27 months, are now sitting. Nodin takes out the spotted fawn and the small bear and pretends that they are barking at each other. Sakari gets upset and tells him "Bears don't bark!" She finds the dog, shows it to him, and says "Woof!" He takes the dog from her hand and says "Woof!" She grabs the bear and says "Grrrr," and the bear pretends to eat the dog.

Discussion Questions

1. How could you and your protégé match materials, resources and adult-child interactions to the skills of the children?

2. How could you and your protégé extend the activities to include more language and phonemic awareness?

3. If this were your protégé, how could the two of you change the activities and give children varied ways to respond?



EMBEDDED INSTRUCTION

In even the busiest classrooms and child care homes, well-organized teachers can find time to engage children in conversations when they greet them in the morning, change their diapers, help them with dressing and hand-washing tasks, solicit their help with meal preparation, serving and clean-up, help them select and complete activities, read the stories they request.

—B. Bardige and M. Segal (2004)

As a child's day unfolds, a variety of home and classroom routines and daily activities occur. Routines are the scheduled periods that make up the sequence of the day.

Activities in a child's daily routine include those that are child-initiated and based on the child's interests, and those that are directed by staff or parents.

In a typical day in a Head Start classroom this might include arrival, hanging up coats, greeting staff and peers, circle time, choice time, etc. When you think about routines, remember the following points:

Family child care programs may have routines that are similar to a Head Start classroom, or they may be quite different, but most likely there are routines.

- Home Visitors can support parents by helping them to identify existing daily routines in the home, or they can help parents to develop routines that may allow children to be more successful in their learning experiences. Here are some examples:
 - ❑ Home routines include breakfast, diapering, playing with toys while a parent cleans up from breakfast, going to the grocery store or to a playground, napping, picking up older siblings from school or waiting for their bus, and watching a video or TV in the afternoon while a parent cooks dinner.
 - ❑ A simple trip to the grocery store is a daily routine that can provide language development, categorizing, and a variety of other stimulating experiences:
 - “Let's find everything that is yellow in this aisle.”
 - “Where is all of the cereal?”

- “Where is another fruit that is yellow?”
- “How many cheese packages do we have?”

Often, children’s responses do not improve simply by engaging in classroom activities and routines. Protégés must provide the needed materials, intentional and well-planned teaching, models, and assistance to individualize children’s learning experiences. Children are not left to play independently while staff members hope that learning will occur. Protégés become active partners in learning and interacting: following and leading; arranging and waiting; asking and answering; showing, guiding, labeling, describing, and modeling.

By looking at daily routines and experiences in this way, the protégé can aid children who need help maintaining their learning by providing them with intentional teaching, guidance, and modeling.

Planning For Carlos

Maria and her Mentor-Coach, Xavier, have had a good time developing rhyming activities for the class. The children have blossomed in their rhyming skills and are having fun with nursery rhymes and made-up rhymes.

Maria still has many concerns about Carlos. Carlos, age four, enjoys circle time. When Maria presents a rhyming activity with nursery rhymes, he plays with his shoelaces, points to and labels pictures for the rhymes, but cannot give any rhyming words in response to Maria’s prompts. Carlos does like stories. He chooses to spend some time every day in the library corner, usually alone.

Maria and Xavier have been observing Carlos’s behavior for almost two weeks. They realize that he needs more individualized activities if he is going to improve his rhyming skills. They decide that they will increase the number of rhyme-making opportunities in his day.

Together they come up with the following embedded instruction:

- When it is time to go home Maria will say, “See you later, alligator” to Carlos and other class members. With Carlos she will point out the rhyming words.
- At snack time each child will give a rhyming word (real or made-up) for one part of their snack. Maria will help Carlos do this.
- Maria’s assistant, Janiliz, will sing rhyming songs in a small group twice a week. She will choose participants who are strong in rhyming for Carlos to imitate. She will

emphasize rhymes and ask Carlos to repeat several without making him stand out in the group.

- When they get dressed for outdoor play, Maria or Janiliz will be near Carlos and make one or two rhymes about some pieces of his clothing
- When Carlos is alone in the library corner, Maria or Janiliz will go over to him. They will reinforce rhymes whenever they can with books that Carlos chooses.

Maria, Janiliz, and Xavier will make notes on the additional opportunities for rhyming. They will also note any improvements in Carlos's responses. After four weeks they will look at all of their information and decide what their next plan will be.

Activity: Using Embedded Instruction—Part 1

STEP-DOC 4.3b: A Framework for Embedding Individualized Instruction provides Mentor-Coaches with a series of steps for working with protégés.

In summary, the four steps are:

1. Think about the child's routines and experiences of the day, whether in the classroom, family child care program, or at home
2. Identify child outcomes that can be paired with routines
3. Think about how outcomes are intentionally taught or experienced during the routines of the day
4. Develop strategies for individualizing learning for the child as she or he goes through routine experiences and activities during the day.

Your role as a Mentor-Coach is to work with protégés to identify activities and routines that generate learning opportunities. The goal of this and all planning is to lead children to desired language and literacy skills and outcomes.

During conversations with protégés, have them identify existing activities and learning opportunities for children. These conversations provide a framework for building the protégé's capacity to identify and use natural learning environments and routines. Your responsibility is to remain up to date and knowledgeable about evidence-based practices that support language and literacy development and to communicate these effectively to your protégés.

Activity: Using Embedded Instruction—Part 2

Think about the ways you have used embedded instruction as a strategy for individualizing.

1. What did you do?

2. What experiences can you share with your protégé?

3. What does your protégé already do that reflects embedded instruction principles?

4. How could you get your protégé to examine and extend what she does to promote individualized instruction?

5. How might **A Framework for Embedding Individualized Instruction** help you in your work with protégés?

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

1. What have you learned about individualizing and developing instruction?

2. What are some skills you would like to practice?

3. What additional knowledge do you want to acquire? Where might you look for more information?

4. How will this information influence your work as a Mentor-Coach?



EXERCISE 1: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

You are almost at the end of the *Steps to Success* Training. Take time to reflect on the meaning and use of the Professional Development Plan over the course of the training.

Look at your Professional Development Plan and make any updates. You will write in your plan one more time at the end of Module 4.

WRAP-UP

Congratulations! You are nearing the completion of a rigorous training experience. This is the last facilitated session.

Continue on to the next module in the unit (Unit 4, Module 4). Complete the exercises alone or with a colleague.

REMEMBER:
You have one more independent session to complete!

STEP-Doc 4.3a:**Individualized Instruction Strategies to Support Each Child**

Environmental Support: Alter the physical environment and the timing of activities to promote a child's participation:

- Limit the number of manipulatives on the shelves, having neither too many nor too few, to encourage children to use them purposefully and independently.
- Children having difficulty with transitions can carry a picture of the next activity or hold an adult's or peer's hand.
- Be aware of noise that distracts and interferes with hearing and language learning.

Materials Modification: Modify materials so that the child can participate as independently as possible:

- Use tape or contact paper backing rather than glue or paste for children who resist sticky substances.
- For toddlers and young preschoolers, use actual objects for playtime choice. Show the number of objects from each center that corresponds to the number of children who can be in that center.
- Use musical instruments to practice listening skills and sound awareness.

Modified Activity: Simplify a complicated task by breaking it into smaller parts or reducing the number of steps:

- Enrich stories with flannel-board pieces and recordings in the listening center.
- Use verbal cueing, such as giving initial sounds or rhymes, to help a child remember a word.
- Use visual cueing, such as pictures, symbols, color coding, and pointing.
- Use "first this, then that" presentations and phased-in, step-by-step presentation of required tasks.

Use of Child Preferences: Identify and integrate the child's preferences for materials or activities so that the child takes advantage of available opportunities:

- Use favorite toys, materials, or books to maintain attention and interest.
- Let more-distracted children leave the circle, continue with those who remain, and then work individually, in a small group or in a center activity with those who left the circle.

Peer Support: Use peers to increase a child's participation:

- Use language to bring peers together or cue peers to invite a child into play.
- Model at first, and then encourage children to communicate directly with each other. Watch and gauge effectiveness.

Invisible Support: Purposefully arrange naturally occurring events within an activity:

- Use peers to model activities or language before a reluctant child has a turn.
- Build time for practice and repetition into ongoing activities and center activities.

Adult Support: Adults intervene and join the activity to support the child's level of participation:

- Model new and targeted behaviors for the child.
- Include arrangements and methods that enable the child to benefit from the teacher's close attention, such as preferential seating, small groups, and one-to-one or hand-over-hand assistance.

For babies and toddlers, all learning happens within a relationship. Speaking, reading and writing are reciprocal, interactive skills, each supporting the others' development. Being able to communicate and being understood by those around them is a powerful achievement for young children. Staff can help children acquire new experiences within the context of relationships.

—B. Bardige and M. Segal (2004)

STEP-Doc 4.3 b:
A Framework for Embedding Individualized Instruction

- 1. Think about the routines and experiences of the day, whether in a classroom, family child care program, or at home.**
 - Look at the class schedule, daily routines, and plans.
- 2. Identify child outcomes that can be paired with routines.**
 - What do you expect children to typically know and be able to do at these times?
 - Which routines and activities provide the best opportunities for children to practice and acquire language and literacy skills?
- 3. Think about how outcomes are intentionally taught or experienced during the routines of the day.**
 - What does the child do during routines?
 - What is his or her level of current skill for the skill or outcome assessed?
 - How does he or she participate?
- 4. Develop strategies for individualizing instruction.**
 - List the outcomes or skills the child needs to acquire in order to more actively or fully participate in the class routines and experiences.
 - Choose routines during which specific outcomes will be emphasized. Limit the number of routines to no more than three.
 - Describe the teacher instruction and interaction that will be used to support this child's acquisition of these skills or outcomes.